

Tazkiyah

Purification of the Soul



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Urdu version: *Tazkiyah-e-Nafs*

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Contents

Purification of the Self	5
The Reality of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	7
The Importance of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	8
Paradise for the Purified Soul	9
Hadith — A Source of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	10
<i>Tazkiyah</i> — A Continuous Process	11
The Process of De-conditioning	12
<i>Tazkiyah</i> — Spiritual Nourishment	13
<i>Ijtihad</i> is not Permissible in Worship	14
<i>Tazkiyah</i> at Every Moment	15
Introspection after Making a Mistake	17
Heart-based <i>Tazkiyah</i> , Mind-based <i>Tazkiyah</i>	18
The Need of a Guide	20
The Importance of Interaction for <i>Tazkiyah</i>	22
Without Mediation	23
Prior to <i>Tazkiyah</i>	25
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and Introspection	27
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and Modesty	28
Prophetic Prayers	29
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and Dua	31
The Form of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	32

Conscience — A Guide to <i>Tazkiyah</i>	33
The Method of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	34
The More Effective Way to Attain <i>Tazkiyah</i>	35
What are the Means of Attaining <i>Tazkiyah</i> ?	36
<i>Tazkiyah</i> — A Source of Intellectual Development	37
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and Knowledge	38
Save Yourself from Distraction	39
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and the Demands of the Times	40
The Condition of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	42
The Acceptance of Reality	43
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and Sacrifice	44
<i>Tazkiyah</i> — A Psychological Act	46
The Importance of Positive Psychology	48
Introspection — The Basis of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	50
How to Engage in Introspection	51
Seeing a Test Paper in Advance	52
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and Renunciation of the World	53
<i>Tazkiyah</i> — An Act of Preparation	55
<i>Tazkiyah</i> — A Means of Reaching God	58
The Purpose of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	59
The Criterion of <i>Tazkiyah</i>	62
<i>Tazkiyah</i> and Remembrance of Death	63

Purification of the Self

The Quran mentions four responsibilities of the Prophet, one being the purification of the self. (2:129). The fact that this is set forth in the Scriptures underlines the importance of purification. It is, therefore, essential for believers to give first priority to the purification of the self in their lives. Similarly, it is necessary for the *da'i* and the reformer to attach great importance to the process of purification.

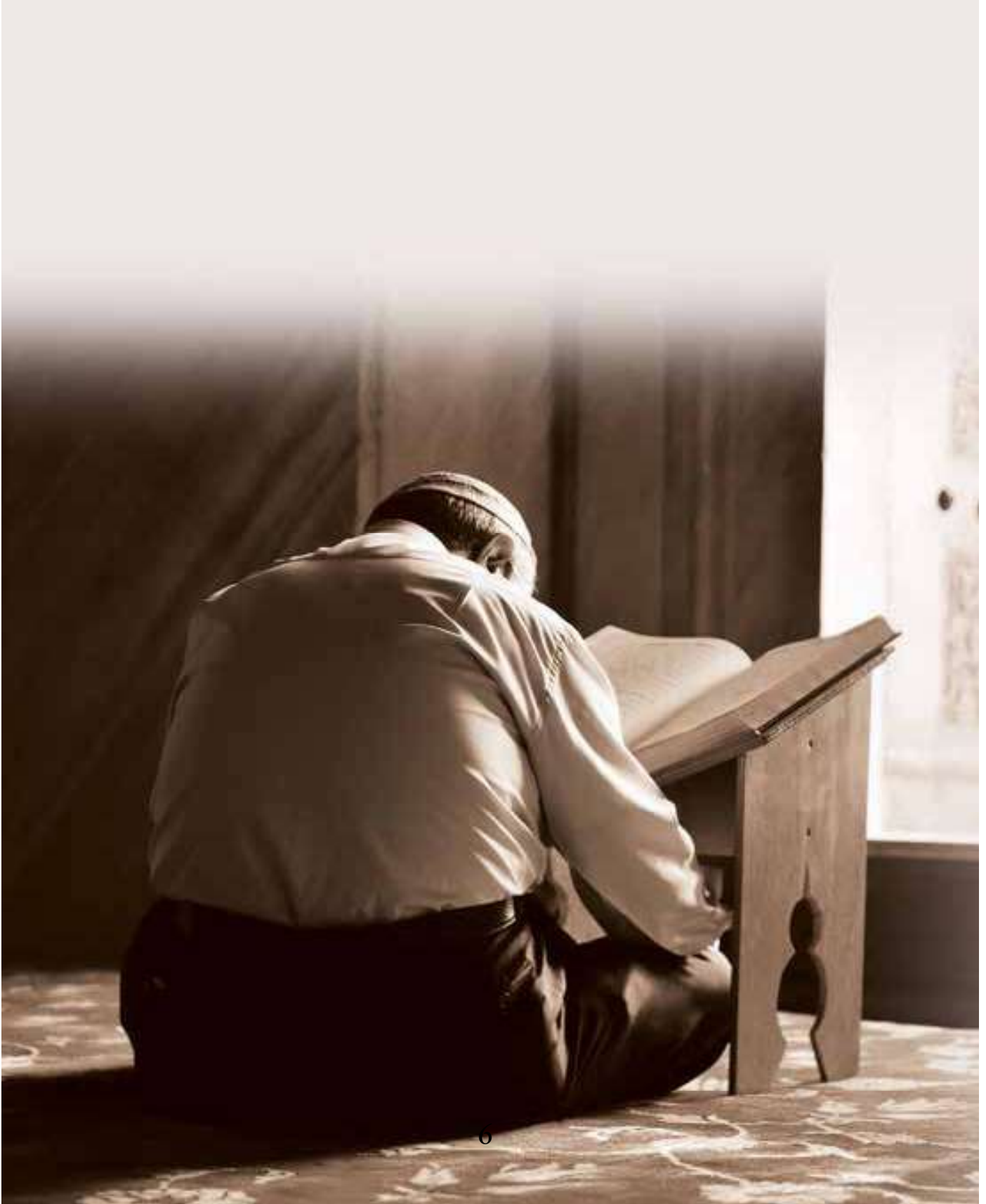
Purification (*tazkiyah*) covers a number of Islamic imperatives: purifying oneself of the temptations of the self and Satan; refraining from negative reaction when faced with unpleasant experiences occasioned by others; and remaining resistant to such influences as cause man to deviate from the straight path, etc.

The truth is that man has been created by God with an upright nature. But in the life of this world, it repeatedly happens that external factors compromise this positive aspect of his character. Man ought to become aware that this is an ever-present possibility and should make unremitting efforts to ward off undesirable influences.

The task of the Prophet was always to make people aware of this principle of purification and lead them towards attaining it. In this context he should be looked upon by mankind as a unique model of self-purification.

With his contemporaries, the Prophet's approach to this task of *tazkiyah* was direct. For later generations the performance of the Prophet's task has to be continued indirectly. On the subject of self-purification, complete records of the Prophet's sayings and deeds, and the sayings and deeds of the Prophet's companions, have been preserved in the books of *Sirah* (the Prophet's biography) and later generations should feel themselves

duty-bound to seek guidance from these records. Those who can read can do so directly, while those who cannot read themselves may seek the assistance of religious scholars, so that they can adopt that course in their lives.



The Reality of *Tazkiyah*

As stated in the second chapter of the Quran, one of the duties of the Prophet vis-à-vis his contemporaries was “to teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them.” (2:129). It is necessary for every believer to purify himself. Without purification, that calibre of personality, which is called in the Quran a God-oriented personality (3:79), cannot be developed. The truth is that purification alone can lead man to heaven. (20:76)

Tazkiyah literally means growth, one example of which can be seen in the tree. A tree is the result of the growth of a seed. When a seed finds a favourable environment, it starts growing until it becomes a green, verdant tree. The same is true of the purification of man. In this sense *tazkiyah* also covers intellectual development.

God has created man with great potential, and this potential of the human personality is actualized by *tazkiyah*. In this sense it would be right to call it the building of the human personality on a divine foundation.

When a person accepts faith he has, in actual fact, started the journey of *tazkiyah*. Gradually, he becomes a purified soul, or an intellectually and spiritually developed personality. This is the man who will gain entrance into the eternal Paradise of the Hereafter.

There is nothing mysterious about *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can be attained, not through meditation but through contemplation. This entails pondering over or thinking about oneself and the universe, and receiving intellectual sustenance for God realization. This is the process which results in a purified personality. There is nothing abstract about *tazkiyah*. It is a known reality. *Tazkiyah* is the result of a struggle on the part of the individual. It is not at all related to any mysterious inspiration from some supposedly saintly person.

The Importance of *Tazkiyah*

A tradition recorded in the books of Hadith is set forth here in the words of Sahih Muslim: “On the Day of Judgement, when all the people of Paradise have entered Paradise and all the people of Hell have entered Hell, Death will be brought there in the form of a white sheep. It will be made to stand between Heaven and Hell. Then it will be said, ‘O People of Paradise, do you recognize it?’ They will look up to it and say, ‘Yes, it is Death.’ After this the people of Hell will be asked, ‘O People of Hell, do you recognize this?’ They will look up and say, ‘Yes, it is Death.’ After this the order will be given for Death to be slaughtered. Then, it will be said, ‘O People of Paradise, now you have eternity and no death, and O People of Hell, now you have eternity and no death.’” (Sahih Muslim, 2849).

What is purification? Purification means making oneself a purified soul, such as will be worthy of inhabiting the refined environment of Paradise. On Doomsday, the purified individuals will be ushered into Paradise and the unpurified individuals will be cast into Hell. After this it will be announced that the law of death has been ended. Now both parties have to abide eternally in their places. This will be a unique moment. The people of Paradise will be in a state of bliss for having found the eternal world of happiness. On the contrary, the people of Hell will experience indescribable remorse, – an eternal torment over what has become their lot because of not having purified their souls. This perception is undoubtedly a powerful incentive to undertaking the process of purification. At that time, they would have lost their last hope: that death would come and save them from the torment of hell.

Paradise for the Purified Soul

According to Chapter 20 of the Quran, Paradise is for one who purifies his soul in this present world and reaches the world hereafter with a purified personality. This reality has been clearly described in many verses of the Quran. Attainment of Paradise will be based on individual merit rather than on personal affiliation to any community or group.

Paradise, therefore, is only for the individual who purifies himself. Purification means abandoning a life of unawareness and leading a life ruled by the conscience. The believer has to save himself from anything which comes in the path of truth, and when he faces any hurdles, he must not resort to expediency. When desires arise within him, he must crush them, and when he is overtaken by arrogance, he should be able to overcome his overweening pride.

Tazkiyah means purifying the individual of unfavourable elements, so that he may reach the point of perfection in a favourable environment. This was a very important task given to the prophets.

A prophet makes the greatest possible efforts to prepare human beings whose hearts are free from the love of all else except the love of God. He strives to bring into existence such souls as are free from complexes and are worthy of receiving the divine provision from the Universe, which God has reserved for true believers.

Purification is the principal condition for entry into Paradise. Without purification, one can never gain entry into the eternal heavenly abode.

Hadith — A Source of *Tazkiyah*

A scholar once said: “Any person who has a collection of Hadith in his house, is as if in the presence of the Prophet who is in conversation with him.”

The above-mentioned saying is not only about what the Prophet had to say but, by implication, it also indicates a form of companionship with the Prophet.

None of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam recorded in the Books of Hadith are purely abstract in sense. Indeed, every saying has a special background. That is to say, the Prophet on different occasions faced a variety of situations and, in accordance with the demands of each situation, he gave people advice. In this way, each saying of the Prophet of Islam relates to particular sets of circumstances. All the sayings of the Prophet are of topical relevance.

If the individual deepens his understanding of the hadith and conceptualizes the background to it, this in itself will be like being in the presence of the Prophet. He will perceive that he is not only reading the sayings of the Prophet, in a book, but is also reading between the lines of the Prophet’s sayings and thus mentally refreshing himself about their background. If the reader of the hadith is enthusiastic about it, he will feel as if he is actually experiencing the companionship of the Prophet. In this way, there will be a manifold enhancement of his understanding of the Hadith.

On reflection, it will be realized that the reader of the Hadith is not just a reader: he is more of a ‘listener’ seated along with the companions in the presence of the Prophet of Islam. This is one of the creative ways of studying the Hadith. And studying the tradition of the Prophet in this creative manner is undoubtedly the greatest source of purification.

Tazkiyah – A Continuous Process

A'isha, the wife of the Prophet of Islam, says of him: "On every occasion, the Prophet of Islam remembered God." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). This tradition shows the prophetic way of purification, that is to say that the Prophet purified himself on all occasions. This shows that *tazkiyah* is not the name of any short training course, but is rather a continuous process. When a believer discovers the truth, thanks to the awakening of his conscience, every event or experience in his life becomes a point of reference for his purification. This enables him to receive spiritual nourishment on a daily basis. In this way, this process of *tazkiyah* continues till his last breath. Just as physical energy is generated by constant nourishment, so also is *tazkiyah* achieved by constant effort. There is the general impression, however, that a brief training course is all that it takes to attain a state of *tazkiyah*. That is, it is just like receiving religious education in a madrasa within the limited frame of a short-term prescribed course of study. But the truth is that this is an underestimation of *tazkiyah*.

Tazkiyah, a cumulative process, and not the result of any fixed practice, requires an awakened mind. It is attained through an unflagging intellectual process and not by engaging in any temporary course of study.

The Process of De-conditioning

Tazkiyah, a continuous process, goes on day in and day out. When it does not happen in this way, there is a Hadith which describes the result of this: “The heart becomes covered with rust, just like iron when it comes in contact with water.” A question was asked: “O Prophet! What is the way to purify or clean one’s heart?” The Prophet replied, “Remembering death often and studying the Quran.”

This tradition of the Prophet tells us of a psychological reality. That is, in the context of the society he lives in, man has repeatedly to undergo such experiences as produce negative feelings within him, for instance, anger, hatred, violence, revenge, etc. Man ought to bury these feelings instantly, for, if he fails to do so, they will become a permanent presence in the human mind, and a time will come when it will be almost impossible to eliminate them.

There are two major parts of the human mind, the conscious and the unconscious. It is quite natural for negative feelings to first of all enter the conscious part of the mind. If such feelings are not immediately cast out from the mind, they gradually reach the unconscious part of the mind, from where it becomes difficult to eradicate them. Man should always remain vigilant about this. At all times he should keep converting his negativity into positivity. That is, he must de-condition his conditioned mind in order to purify it and keep it free from pollution. The only way of purification, or de-conditioning, is to repeatedly remind himself of death and to reflect on the purpose of life in the light of the Quran.

Tazkiyah – Spiritual Nourishment

The body requires physical food. When it receives its food, it becomes healthy. Similarly, the soul requires spiritual provision. When the soul is provided with such food, it becomes healthy. This process is called purification of the soul and this healthy soul is called a purified and cleansed soul.

According to the Quran, the food for the soul is in thinking. (3:191). At every moment certain incidents take place in the life of a man. These incidents appear at the level of society, history, the universe, etc. Thinking about these incidents or events and deriving lessons from them, is food for the soul.

One who develops his consciousness to such an extent that he sees the glory of God in the events which take place around him, and for whom these events become a means of remembering God, has obtained the divine provision for his soul. His soul will continue to receive this healthy nourishment until he finally leaves this world to be ushered into the Divine Presence.

The most important source of *tazkiyah* is the lessons one learns to take from every happening. The ability to learn lessons is the basis of *tazkiyah*. This is the soil from which *tazkiyah* grows. Trying to encourage its growth at any other place is like trying to grow a green tree on a rock. The source of *tazkiyah* is divine provision and not human provision. It is the result of that process which is directly established between God and man through a psychological relationship. *Tazkiyah* is not achieved through any intermediary between God and man. *Tazkiyah* is a blessing which man receives from God.

Ijtihad is not Permissible in Worship

A religious scholar once visited a well-known Sufi hospice, where he found that people were engaged in loud recitation (*zikr bil jebr*) and other such rituals. On observing this, the scholar cited a tradition of the Prophet which said that “anyone who invents anything in this religion which is not in it stands rejected.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, No. 2697)

The scholar said that these Sufi rituals were not prevalent at the time of the Prophet and his companions, therefore, they would be regarded as innovations. The Sufi replied that what is forbidden in the Hadith is innovation in religion (*ihdath fil-amr*). It does not forbid innovation for religion (*ihdath lil-amr*), and all the practices of *tasawwuf* are of the nature of innovation for religion.

This explanation of this tradition is unacademic. If we consider its exact wording, it has no basis in the Hadith. That is, something that has been added to the religion the Prophet has bequeathed to his people is expressed as ‘what is not in it.’ In such a case, the problem is not that of a change of preposition; the real problem is whether or not the religion that we received from the Prophet of Islam contained what now presents itself as an addition of later times. It is an established fact that rituals such as repeated loud recitations of Quranic phrases were not practiced in the religion handed down to us by the Prophet.

Religious scholars are agreed on their stand that there can be no guesswork in religious worship. That is, no *ijtihad* will be engaged in in the matter of worship, in which domain any inference or argument will be held valid only when it is based on the religious texts, the Quran and Hadith. Exercising *ijtihad* based on anything else is, from the religious point of view, both unscholarly and unacceptable.

Tazkiyah at Every Moment

There is the general misconception that *tazkiyah* is a temporary course of action or, that to achieve it, some particular words or phrases have to be recited at fixed times. But this ritualistic form of *tazkiyah* is unnatural: nothing can be achieved by resorting to such short-term methods.

The truth is that, just as one inhales oxygen at every moment—there being no temporary way of inhaling, —*tazkiyah* too is a continuous process. The real *tazkiyah* is that which continues at every moment. For instance, in this couplet by a Persian poet:

Bar mazaar-e-ma nay cheraghe nay guley

Nay par-e-parvana raqsad

Nay sadai bulbule

(I being a poor man, there is no lamp, no flower on my grave, that is why no fly hovers around my grave, no nightingale chirps at my grave).

When a couplet like this comes to mind, you should first think how great a state of ignorance the poet is in. He is thinking of the lamp and the flower at his grave. But the real problem is that, after death, man reaches another world, the demands of which are different from those of the present world. In that world certain superior qualities will be required, over and above those possessed in this world. Furthermore, there will be no time for preparation in the next world. There we shall find only the result of today's action: there will be no opportunities to take remedial action.

The result of such revised thinking will be that this couplet, which people recite purely for enjoyment, will teach the individual a great lesson. He will start preparing himself for developing

such a personality as will bring him success in the world of the Hereafter. With this mental reorientation, he will start thinking about what he will undergo after death, instead of what the fate of his grave will be.



Introspection after Making a Mistake

Introspection is a major source of *tazkiyah*. Introspection awakens the human mind, it jolts the human personality, it gives the individual the incentive to reform himself. In this way introspection leads one to intellectual and spiritual development.

For instance, suppose someone said something which hurt you, you were provoked and you reacted negatively. Later, you became repentant and engaged in introspection, which led to your thinking that by having behaved in this way, you were developing a negative personality, such as would have a deleterious effect in the life after death. Such a negative personality would, indeed, render one incapable of gaining entry into Paradise.

You came to realize that the culture of the people of Paradise would be that of peace; only those would be accommodated there who had the capacity to live together in love and peace. This being so, one who develops a personality which is intolerant, easily provoked and downright unfriendly will be held ineligible to enter Paradise and will be deprived of happiness and success for all eternity.

Such thinking will prove to be revolutionary and you will become your own watchdog. You will become extremely keen to reform yourself.

Thinking born of introspection is the greatest source of *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can always be achieved by inner self-appraisal, rather than by some external activity.

Heart-based *Tazkiyah*, Mind-based *Tazkiyah*

Study the last part of the third chapter of the Quran which exhorts people of understanding to reflect on the signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth so that they should realize their Lord. Through these signs, you will learn of the Creation Plan of God, you will discover heaven and hell, and you will comprehend the importance of the Prophet, —in short, all those things which are related directly or indirectly to *tazkiyah*. In all these verses of the Quran the realization of God is linked with pondering over the universe. In other words, *tazkiyah*, according to the Quran, is based on the mind and not on the heart. In this connection the word ‘heart’ is used in the Quran and the Hadith in the literary sense and not in the physical sense. In later times, Muslims came under the influence of the Sufis, who believed in the concept of *tazkiyah* based on the heart.

According to this concept, it came to be accepted that the human heart was the treasure house of all divine realities. It was believed that one could reach this treasure house through meditation and then one would attain *tazkiyah*. But this concept of heart-based *tazkiyah* was not derived from the Quran. It was in fact derived from history. This concept of heart-based spirituality had its origin in ancient times and, as a matter of tradition, people introduced it into Islam.

Modern science has provided the scientific foundation by which Islamic *tazkiyah*, based on the mind, can once again be revived. Modern research has proved that the human heart functions only as a pump for the circulation of the blood. The heart has no capacity to think. The mind alone possesses the capacity to think. All human actions come into existence through

thinking and the way to attain *tazkiyah* is no exception. *Tazkiyah* is achieved at the level of the mind, rather than through any strivings at the level of the heart. For the attainment of *tazkiyah*, paying attention to the heart is as infructuous as paying attention to one's nails or hair or anything else.



The Need of a Guide

In principle, the path to *tazkiyah* for man is to reflect upon the Quran and to study the Hadith in order to find guidance from the lives of the prophets of Islam. This is the basic source of *tazkiyah*, and its importance will last for all eternity. Besides this, there is also a practical way of attaining *tazkiyah*, and that is to find a living guide, thus benefitting from his learning and experience. When a guide is found, he ought to be accepted as such unconditionally. Making conditions before accepting a guide only sets up a hurdle in the path of *tazkiyah*.

When anyone says that he has accepted someone unconditionally, this does not mean that he has entered into this arrangement with blind faith. It only means that, as a result of the development of moral consciousness, two human beings have come together on the same wavelength. This is a case of intellectual affinity, rather than a case of blind faith. When two human beings reach the core of truth, they naturally enter a state of intellectual commonality. They become, as it were, intellectual “twins”.

A guide is essential for the attainment of *tazkiyah*, but the importance of the guide is practical rather than a matter of creed. The importance of a guide, in actual fact, relates directly to the general *Sunnah* of God. This *Sunnah* has been described in the following verse of the Quran: ‘It is We who distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and raise some of them above others in rank, so that they may take one another into service.’ (43:32). This verse shows that it is not the way of God to bestow on everyone the qualities required for a guide. It is the way of God to

give leadership qualities to particular persons and others are required to follow them. This is the natural system of life according to the way of God.

The case of a religious guide also relates directly to this way of God, for God grants special help to those who have to perform this role. The duty of *tazkiyah* seekers is to recognize them, and receive guidance from them in order to achieve their objective. Those who fail to do so will be treated as failures in this test of nature.

There is nothing mysterious about this. It falls within a known and natural sphere and can be understood upon reflection. What is received from a religious guide is not something mysterious in nature: it is the same as what in general terms is called a training course. A religious guide is a living guide rather than a sacred personality in some mysterious sense of the word.



The Importance of Interaction for *Tazkiyah*

Companionship is a very helpful means of attaining *tazkiyah*. In ancient times, social meeting, face to face, was the sole way of having companionship.

In the present age, people may be living at great distances from each other, so that companionship may appear to be out of the question. Yet it is still possible for the *tazkiyah*-seeker to have the benefits of his guide's companionship through tele-counselling, which is more immediate than communicating by means of letters or books, as was formerly done. If anyone is a seeker of *tazkiyah* in the real sense, the new channels of communication will serve as a viable alternative to actual companionship.

The printing press, one of these modern means of communication, has made it possible to learn about *tazkiyah* on a continuous basis through reading material such as books and magazines. These have to be seriously studied if the *tazkiyah*-seeker is to become really familiar with the subject. From the Quran itself (96:4), we come to know of the importance of this method of learning from the written word, that is, imbibing the spirit of religion through books.

In one respect, the importance of study is not less than that of companionship. Indeed, the consistent study of books enables one to think deeply on the subject. Yet, although the study of books is of great benefit, interaction is still essential for *tazkiyah*, because that facilitates a fruitful exchange of ideas. That is, one must keep in touch with the religious guide and seek guidance from him in all matters. This contact can be made through direct meetings or through other means of communication. Such contact is necessary on a daily basis; occasional contact will not serve the purpose.

Without Mediation

Consciously or unconsciously, people generally think that *tazkiyah* requires some mysterious mediation, say, of past saintly figures or great men of learning, or some religious guide who has attained a high degree of spirituality, etc. According to this mysterious concept of mediation, the religious guide (*shaikh*) himself becomes the goal, or the focus, whereas it is God Who must be at the centre and the position of the religious guide must be purely peripheral, i.e., as a means to an end.

The concept of mediation is entirely without foundation. *Tazkiyah* is attained through contact with God, without any mediation; no mediation can be of any help in this matter.

Real *tazkiyah* is bestowed by God. There is no need of mediation to receive this gift from God. God directly bestows whatever He wills on all human beings; the condition for this to happen is to become a seeker of *tazkiyah* in real earnest.

The Quran says: “When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.” (2:186)

The word “near” used in the above verse of the Quran, shows that the means of attaining *tazkiyah* is to come close to God rather than rely upon mediation or a mediator. He, who wants to purify himself, ought to awaken his mind and make efforts to come as near to God as possible.

No mediation can ever be helpful in achieving this goal. *Tazkiyah* can only be attained directly from God. There is no other way of attaining *tazkiyah*. The truth is that the concept of mediation is an obstacle in the path of *tazkiyah*. When God is

closer to man “than his jugular vein” (50:16), why should there be any need for mediation?

The concept of mediation stems from the notion that there can be a mysterious relationship between a human being and God, whereas the concept of a religious guide is established at a conscious level between the follower and the guide.



Prior to *Tazkiyah*

The real incentive to the attainment of *tazkiyah* is the feeling of being devoid of spiritual resources. The more one acknowledges one's feeling of need, the more one feels the necessity for *tazkiyah*. One so motivated will naturally seek fulfillment of this need.

This discovery starts with one's own existence. First of all, man consciously discovers his own existence. This discovery arouses his curiosity as to who is his Creator. In this way he discovers his Creator. This discovery produces a tremendous feeling of the greatness of his Creator.

Then he reflects that, as a needy person in the fullest sense of the word, he has been unable to fulfill any of his needs by dint of his own strength. It is not by his own efforts that all the basic things he requires are already there for him – earth, water, air oxygen, light, food and all those numerous things which are known to be constituents of the life support system. No, indeed. All are there for him as unconditional gifts. After this discovery, he attempts to understand who is the giver of all these blessings. In this way, he discovers his Lord. As a result of this, an immense amount of love is engendered within him for the Giver.

His search then leads him to the question: what is his goal? Then he learns that he cannot reach his desired goal in the present world. This discovery finally makes him extremely desirous of Paradise, where he may attain his goal and have a life of fulfillment.

In a similar way, when he goes further in this thinking, he discovers that he needs authentic guidance for his life. Then he comes to the conclusion that, despite every effort, he cannot find such guidance on his own. This discovery leads him to the reality that the only possible source of authentic guidance is a prophet.

He thus wholeheartedly accepts the Prophet as his guide. After all these discoveries, he naturally becomes a modest person. He begins to live in the greatness of God. God's creations become a perpetual impetus to His remembrance. He accepts the Prophet as the perfect guide and Paradise becomes his greatest goal. These are the experiences relating to the realization of God which can be described as *tazkiyah*.



Tazkiyah and Introspection

Tazkiyah is not a one-time course. That is, it is not possible to take a course for a temporary period and become a permanently purified person. The truth is that purification is a continuous process, which lasts for a lifetime. *Tazkiyah* is an act of introspection, in which one has to monitor one's own actions. One who is desirous of *tazkiyah* must be careful about his speech and actions at every moment. With total objectivity, he must repeatedly engage in self-reappraisal. This process of introspection is set in only in one who repents and does introspection.

This present world – a testing ground – has been created by the Creator in such a way that at every moment man is beset by trials. Repeatedly faced with the demands of the self, satanic temptations may lead him to do something undesirable; and unfavourable circumstances, coupled with a bad environment, may cause him to fall a prey to evil influences. All such failings run counter to *tazkiyah*.

Man should be so sensitive in this matter that, on each such occasion of temptation, he immediately becomes alert to the immanent dangers. One purifies oneself and then does one's utmost to re-purify. Re-purifying oneself on such occasions is *tazkiyah*. But without introspection, no one can become a purified personality. Introspection leads to intellectual development, which is a guarantee that the process of *tazkiyah* will continue to take place.

Tazkiyah and Modesty

No crops can grow on barren land. Requiring favourable soil for their growth, they must grow on fertile land. So also does *tazkiyah* require favourable soil from which to grow. And that favourable soil is modesty. The quality of modesty greatly facilitates the attainment of *tazkiyah*. On the contrary, arrogance is unfavourable to its attainment. An arrogant person can never attain the goal of self-purification. The most significant feature of modesty is that it causes a person to feel that there is something lacking in him.

The result of this feeling is that when the truth becomes evident to him, he accepts it without any reservation. He receives it in an unbiased way and soon discovers that this truth can compensate for his shortcomings. Thus, he accepts the truth as if it belonged to him. This quality is the spirit, or essence, of *tazkiyah*. The case of an arrogant person is quite the opposite. The thinking of an arrogant person is that he already has everything and need not take anything from anyone. For this reason, he is not able to accept advice from others. He rejects the message of the reformer. This attitude becomes an obstacle to his taking to the path of *tazkiyah*.

The truth is that *tazkiyah*, a continuous process, can have its effect only on a modest person. Modesty enables one to accept the truth and frees one from psychological complexes. Only a complex-free soul can succeed in attaining the goal of *tazkiyah*.

Prophetic Prayers

Many traditions have been recorded in the books of hadith, which tell us that the Prophet used to recite certain words of prayer at certain times. These words are generally known as *masnun dhikr*, or *masnun dua*. Generally, it is believed that these words recited by the Prophet are the greatest source of *tazkiyah*, and that one should learn them and keep reciting them on certain occasions in order to achieve the ends of *tazkiyah*.

However, this is not true. These words uttered by the Prophet are in actual fact a reflection of the feelings or states of mind of the Prophet. The truth is that the Prophet of Islam, because of his high levels of realization, used to be constantly preoccupied by thoughts of God. On different occasions this inner feeling found expression in words. Today, those who study books of Hadith only know the words of the Prophet: they stop short of knowing his feelings or states of mind. This is why they take the words to be all in all. Subscribing to this concept of prophetic prayers is to underestimate the words of the Prophet.

In its reality, prophetic prayer is meant to awaken one's consciousness. Then it is only through the continual thinking process thus initiated that we may develop such a personality as lives in thoughts of God. This is, as it were, the first prerequisite for learning from the prayers of the Prophet. After this the words of prayer uttered by him will be of great importance so far as the development of a spiritual personality is concerned. Without this preparation, repeating the words of the Prophet, rather than *following* the words of the Prophet in the real sense, is nothing but empty repetition.

People, consciously or unconsciously, regard the prayers

of the Prophet as having been couched in sacred words, which possess mysterious qualities. But this is not true. The truth is that the prayers of the Prophet tell us of the states of the Prophet, rather than being just words in the simple sense.



Tazkiyah and Dua

What is prayer? Prayer is an expression in words of the feeling which is produced after a helpless man discovers the Almighty God. The prayers of the Prophet are also an expression of these feelings for the Almighty God. They are not just another name for a set of words uttered by the Prophet on certain occasions. The Prophet's prayers are, in actual fact, spiritual discoveries, far from a mere utterance of a set of words.

According to a *hadith qudsi* (the *hadith* in which the Prophet says that God says so and so), the Prophet observed: "I am with the expectations of My servant, so he ought to have good expectations about Me." What is this hope or expectation? It relates in actual fact to man's discovering certain attributes of God, and then on the basis of this discovery, having good expectations of God: that is, he seeks goodness from God.

For instance, the Quran says: "He has given you all that you asked of Him." (14:34). This verse provides a point of reference to man who may invoke God's blessings thus: "O God, I was not even aware of my needs in the life of this world that I should have asked You for those things. You on Your own arranged for all my requirements to be met in my worldly life. Now, in the life Hereafter, I ask You to provide me with all the things I require in the next world."

This kind of prayer always comes to one's lips after a great psychological turmoil. Another name for this psychological storm is *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* and prayer are interdependent. *Tazkiyah* will always be followed by *dua*.

Praying to God (*dua*) is a proof that the process of *tazkiyah* is at work. There is no *tazkiyah* without prayer, and vice versa.

The Form of *Tazkiyah*

There is no visible form of *tazkiyah*. Had there been a fixed form of *tazkiyah*, man would think, consciously or unconsciously that, by observing that form, he had completed the course of *tazkiyah*. In this way, he would become content. But the feeling of contentment in this matter is very harmful. It is essential for the attainment of *tazkiyah* that one should always have a certain feeling of inadequacy. Such a feeling makes one continuously strive to undergo the process of *tazkiyah*, whereas any feeling of contentment blocks the incentive to make unremitting efforts.

Tazkiyah and the Islamic way of worship are closely interrelated. Neither can be separated from the other. No one can say that he has completed the process of *tazkiyah* and is therefore no longer required to perform the acts of worship ordained in Islam.

But this does not mean that the performance of the form of worship in itself is sufficient to serve the purpose of *tazkiyah*. The correct position is that worship is an external manifestation of the spirit of *tazkiyah*. If the spirit of *tazkiyah* is produced within one, in the real sense, then inevitably one will become God's worshipper.

Worship cannot be separated from *tazkiyah*. But full emphasis should be laid upon producing the spirit of *tazkiyah*, rather than upon the external form of worship. It would be true to say that, without worship, the claim to have attained *tazkiyah* is false. But it is also a fact that the outward form of worship cannot automatically produce the spirit of *tazkiyah*.

Conscience – A Guide to *Tazkiyah*

Man is endowed with a natural faculty called the conscience, which serves as a divine teacher and a guide to *tazkiyah*. Conscience guides man on all occasions, albeit wordlessly—do this, don't do that, this behaviour is in accordance with *tazkiyah* and that behaviour is against *tazkiyah*, this behaviour will help in developing a purified personality and that behaviour will defile your personality.

But experience shows that the majority of the people don't allow their conscience to act as a guide to *tazkiyah*. What is the reason for this? The reason is that everyone is given another faculty, which is the opposite of conscience, and that is the ego. Man often comes under the influence of the self, or Satan, He does not let the conscience work for him. The voice of the conscience can be heard on all occasions, but the ego suppresses that voice and renders it ineffective.

It is essential for a seeker of *tazkiyah* to be abreast of this reality, so that he awakens his power of thinking, and nullifies his ego on all occasions. The moment one is able to overcome one's ego, one's conscience will be able to play its natural role and one will be able to traverse the path of *tazkiyah* without any deviation. The exercise of nullifying the ego or reducing it to zero has a decisive role to play. But no one can perform this task for another. One has to do it oneself; the moment one's ego is awakened, one should become alert and by exercising one's will power set one's ego at naught.

The Method of *Tazkiyah*

Many attempts have been made to describe a number of methods of *tazkiyah*. Lists of these methods have also been prepared. But the truth is that there is no list that can be prepared for the method of *tazkiyah*. This is because no list, however long it may be, can be complete. No list can cover all the methods of *tazkiyah*, and later experiences will prove that that “long” list was also less than complete.

The truth is that *tazkiyah* relates not to some list but is the product rather of man’s own will and intention. If man were indeed serious about *tazkiyah* and wanted to attain it honestly, he would certainly succeed in this. But if man is not totally serious about it and shows no eagerness about attaining it, then no amount of writing or speeches will suffice for his self-purification.

It is a unique quality of man that he is able to find justification for every mistake he makes. He is always able to find beautiful words to portray his faults as virtues and his mistakes as right action. This being so, no reformer or well-wisher can bring about the *tazkiyah* of this kind of person. To attain *tazkiyah*, one must take a conscious decision about oneself. This decision should be so firm that one remains steadfastly true to it and makes no excuses to renege upon it.

What is required for *tazkiyah* is willpower. This should be so firm that it remains unaffected by any temptation or any fear of damage to worldly interests.

The will must be resistant to any form of pressure. One who aims at self purification should be willing to do whatever religion requires him to do, whatever the cost at the practical and psychological levels.

The More Effective Way to Attain *Tazkiyah*

One method of attaining *tazkiyah* is to formulate certain principles in an abstract way, put them in writing and ask others to read them. This may be one way to achieve *tazkiyah*, but the more effective way is to relate those principles to some situation. One form of this second method requires a living spiritual guide. Another method is for one to develop his thinking to the point of discovering on his own the element of *tazkiyah* in every experience or observation, and then making that experience or observation a part of his thinking.

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, a Companion of the Prophet, once said that even if the Prophet saw a bird flying in the air with outstretched wings, he would give them some lesson in the realization of God. (*Tabaqat ibn Sa'd*, hadith no. 2354). This is an example of imparting education in *tazkiyah* with reference to some situation.

The fact is that there is no abstract method of effectively achieving *tazkiyah*. The only way is for man to make himself so intellectually aware that he can develop in himself the ability “to learn a lesson” (15:75).

He may relate the situation confronting him to *tazkiyah* and then learn a spiritual lesson from it. In everyday experiences, we have the stuff of *tazkiyah*. Learn to see daily experiences from this standpoint, then every experience and every observation will become for you a stepping stone to *tazkiyah*.



What are the Means of Attaining *Tazkiyah*?

Traditionally, some things are considered to be the means of attaining *tazkiyah*, such as, supererogatory prayers, recitation of the Quran, prophetic prayers, meditation, companionship, taking lessons from the lives of the “saints”, etc. According to this thinking, *tazkiyah* is like a fixed course, or something to be learned from a manual. However, the truth is that there is no fixed course for attaining *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* can be attained only through a living act. The real means of attaining the ends of *tazkiyah* is for man to reflect on the signs of God, activate his thinking, and through continuous reflection or pondering, discover the deeper realities of things. This discovery is spiritual food for a person who is a seeker of *tazkiyah*. For instance, suppose you see a bird. This reminds you of this saying of the Prophet that the hearts of the people of Paradise will be like the hearts of birds.

You later begin to think about yourself – whether or not your heart is like that of the bird; whether or not your heart is free of all negative thinking like that of the bird; whether or not you are free from greed like the bird; whether or not you are as harmless as a bird; whether or not you follow the law of nature, just as the bird does. Such thinking is the essence of *tazkiyah*. Without such introspection, no one can attain *tazkiyah*.

In its reality, *tazkiyah* is an act of spiritually developing one’s own self. In engaging in self-purification, one has to become one’s own teacher and has to purify oneself. Sitting in the company of another or listening to someone else’s preaching cannot in itself be effective for one who aspires to *tazkiyah*. Initial guidance can be provided by another person, but taking it to completion is a task one must achieve oneself. In the process of attaining *tazkiyah*, if

the share of the other person is 1% then one's own share is 99%.

Tazkiyah – A Source of Intellectual Development

Tazkiyah literally means purification. In the extended sense it means growth. In this respect, *tazkiyah* means intellectual development.

The mind is not something stagnant, it is ever-growing, like a tree. It is this process which is called “adding faith to their faith” (48:4) in the Quran. Adding faith to faith means development in consciousness, which is another name for intellectual development. The real faith is one which does not stagnate, but grows continuously in its conviction about God.

How does *tazkiyah* or intellectual development take place? The path to this is contemplation. Contemplation is in itself a continuous process – contemplating the Quran and Hadith, the life of the Prophet, the lives of the Companions, the various human disciplines, the universe, the earth and the heavens. There is also the kind of contemplation which takes place during serious discussions. In this process of contemplation, new ideas emerge, deeper meanings come to light, new aspects hitherto unexplored of different events and realities are discovered, etc.

For one who possesses true faith, every study and observation will become a means of divine discovery; every experience will bring him closer to God. If initially, his faith is in the form of a seed, it will keep growing and assume the form of a fully-grown tree – *tazkiyah* is the Islamic name for this intellectual and spiritual process.

Faith initially brings us into the fold of Islam, then *tazkiyah* helps in the development of this faith.

Tazkiyah and Knowledge

According to one point of view regarding the method of *tazkiyah*, the company of a Sufi who has attained the state of realization is a must, because just one glance from such a person is considered enough to bring about a change in the human psyche. But this point of view cannot be substantiated by either the Quran or the Hadith. According to the Quran and the Hadith, *tazkiyah* can be attained only by man's own reflection and introspection. If one has developed right thinking, by studying the relevant books and by observation of nature, one will derive lessons which will help one in purifying one's personality.

Chapter 35 of the Quran mentions mountains in which there are streaks of various shades. Then the verse goes on to say, "Only those of His servants, who possess knowledge, fear God." (35:28). This verse shows that the knowledge of mountains or natural events should create fear of God in man. That is to say, the source of fear is learning. The more learning one acquires, the more one will be able to understand the wisdom in God's creation.

Study increases the capacity to think in man. Study enables man to derive the food of realization from things at a deeper level. For instance, everyone inhales the air for the oxygen it provides. It is thus possible for everyone to be thankful to God for this. However, a person who has any knowledge of modern discoveries about the respiratory system, will be a thousand times more grateful, and thus his *tazkiyah* will also develop to a much greater degree than one who doesn't know of these discoveries.

The fact is that knowledge provides a wide framework for developing one's *tazkiyah*. Through knowledge, which is like a booster, one discovers new aspects of increasing *tazkiyah*.

Save Yourself from Distraction

One principle of success in this world is to abandon one thing in favour of another.

It is human psychology that man cannot focus on two things at a time. If he focuses on one thing, his mind will be diverted from another. This same principle applies to *tazkiyah*. Also, one who wants to engage in self-purification will necessarily have to totally abandon all things irrelevant to *tazkiyah*.

The greatest obstacle in the path of *tazkiyah* is distraction. It is essential for the seeker of *tazkiyah* to make *tazkiyah* his supreme goal; to keep himself totally away from all things related to distraction. Concentration is essential for *tazkiyah*, one who does not have the capacity to concentrate will certainly fall far short of the attainment of *tazkiyah*.

Everything has its price and *tazkiyah* too has its price. That price is keeping oneself away from all kinds of distraction, for instance, family programmes, friendship culture, the love of food, clothes, the craving for fame and wealth and other temptations in life.

All such things for a seeker of *tazkiyah* amount to distraction. Anyone who wants to purify himself must distance himself totally from all such things.

Tazkiyah gives man a noble character and enables man to be deserving of the angels' company. *Tazkiyah* brings man close to God. Without this man is like dry wood; whereas with *tazkiyah*, man becomes a green tree. *Tazkiyah* is not something mysterious: it can be equated with an awakening of the consciousness of faith.

Tazkiyah and the Demands of the Times

The mindset of the people differs from age to age. One accepts something only when it is in accordance with one's way of thinking. This is what is called the addressing of the mind. Just as making concessions to the human mind is necessary in other matters, it is likewise necessary in the matter of *tazkiyah* as well.

In ancient times thinking was traditional but the modern age is that of scientific thinking. To bring about *tazkiyah* in people of the present times, it is essential to speak to them in a way that addresses their minds. The source of *tazkiyah* in present times is exactly the same as it was in ancient times. However, there is a difference of approach between the two—that of manner of speech and reasoning. In ancient times the traditional ways were effective for people of that age, but, in present times, for effective *tazkiyah*, it is essential to change the style of speech. Only then will it be possible for the modern man to understand the importance of *tazkiyah* and adopt it in his life.

For instance, in ancient times, the word “purification” or ‘reform’ of the self was used. This word could address the ancient traditional mind.

However, the modern man can understand this subject better if we change our wording or mode of addressing the subject. That is, we have to consider that every person, for various reasons, is a case for the conditioning of the mind. For the purpose of a human being's reform, it is essential to de-condition his mind, i.e., re-engineer his mind to make him capable of seeing reality “as it is” and thus form accurate opinions. To address people's minds, according to this style of *tazkiyah*, it is essential for the guide, or teacher, to possess a

vast knowledge of both ancient and modern learning, without which the task of *tazkiyah* cannot be effectively performed with the modern man.



The Condition of *Tazkiyah*

Tazkiyah is not just some technical science. Technical science can be expressed fully in words, whereas *tazkiyah* is a science of realization and, as such can be only partially expressed in words. Every facet of *tazkiyah* requires some addition which can only be produced by the seeker of *tazkiyah*.

It is necessary for the attainment of *tazkiyah* that the seeker of *tazkiyah* be totally serious in his quest. This means that his mind should be prepared, that he should be very keen to learn, be free of all kinds of prejudices, be a complex-free soul, have the ability to see things as they are, be capable of rising above personal predilections, and have the ability to stand up to criticism, or should welcome criticism just as he welcomes praise; he should be ready to accept the truth without any preconditions and readily concede his mistakes. Finally, he must see things from the right angle.

Two parties are involved in the process of *tazkiyah* – the teacher and seeker. The role of neither is 100%: both have to perform 50% of the task. The role of the teacher is that of a guide in the real sense. He should have understood the subject so thoroughly by a deeper study of the Quran and the Hadith that he is able to explain it in the best possible way.

In this matter the other half role is to be played by the seeker. The seeker must be fully capable of acceptance; he must come out of his conditioning to understand the message; he must be able to rise above his fixed mindset and be able to give importance to the truth and not to “who said it”. One who has all these qualities can successfully follow the path of *tazkiyah*.

The Acceptance of Reality

By the highest standard of humanity, man should be able to accept the reality or truth. This is very important for every human being. And the discovery of reality must result in its acknowledgement. If someone is unaware of the reality, he will be reckoned an ignorant person. If after the discovery of reality, a person fails to express it publicly, this amounts to living by double standards or being hypocritical.

This is no simple act. It is, in fact, a development of the human personality along the right lines and *tazkiyah* is only the other name for this development of the human personality.

There is nothing mysterious about *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* is the result of the awakening of such consciousness as enables man to attribute everything to God; every experience becomes a means of bringing him closer to God. It is through these experiences that a personality develops which may be called a purified personality.

The truth is that the whole matter is one of right or wrong attribution. Wrongly attributing events to anyone other than God is to pollute one's soul. This is to deprive oneself of the opportunity to purify oneself. On the contrary, when one attributes events to the true Creator, one emancipates and uplifts one's soul. By availing of all such opportunities, one develops one's personality by purifying one's soul. *Tazkiyah* cannot be attained in a vacuum; it comes about in the course of the everyday events of life. What is required for *tazkiyah* is an awakened mind, rather than some mysterious action performed in seclusion.

Tazkiyah and Sacrifice

The attainment of *tazkiyah* is no simple matter: it always requires some sacrifice, which is psychological rather than physical in nature. This sacrifice is to completely renounce, for the sake of *tazkiyah*, those things that run counter to acquiring *tazkiyah*. It is a principle of nature that in order to achieve something, one has to let go of some other thing. This principle is as important in the case of *tazkiyah* as in any other case.

One of the things to rid oneself of is bad habits. Due to environmental influences, every man and woman becomes accustomed to certain habits which are detrimental to the attainment of *tazkiyah*. It is absolutely necessary for a seeker of *tazkiyah* to totally rid himself of such habits. Some of these habits include speaking excessively without thinking, busying oneself with the demands of one's family, taking a lot of interest in eating and clothes, pursuing the culture of entertainment, speaking to others of someone's negative points or shortcomings, going shopping and on outings, spending extravagantly instead of limiting oneself to one's needs, having superficial tastes, becoming angry at criticism and feeling happy when praised, being greedy for material things, not restricting oneself to one's needs and preferring affectations to simplicity.

Everything has a price and there is a price for attaining *tazkiyah*, viz. abstaining from everything that goes against achieving this goal. A person who wants to attain *tazkiyah*, but is not ready to give up all that which prevents one from attaining *tazkiyah*, is certainly not serious in his quest. *Tazkiyah* can never become a reality if the seeker is of a non-serious temperament. A frivolous mentality and *tazkiyah* do not go together.

A person who is serious in his pursuit of *tazkiyah* will himself realize which things are favourable to *tazkiyah* and which are not.

His sincerity will compel him to pursue whatever is favourable to *tazkiyah* and totally refrain from anything which goes against it. Sincerity is a guarantee that a man will certainly reach the stage of *tazkiyah*.



Tazkiyah — A Psychological Act

The attainment of *tazkiyah* is not possible through any kind of verbal repetition, neither is it related to any kind of physical exercise. *Tazkiyah* is wholly a psychological act and can be attained only at that level.

A psychological act means an act at the intellectual level. The human mind is at the centre of all kinds of human development. It is in fact the mind which is the deciding factor in shaping the human personality. The non-purified personality and the purified personality are both products of the mind.

It is a positive intellectual development which is actually required for *tazkiyah*. That is, one has to develop one's conscious mind to such an extent that it may become discriminating, it may convert negative thoughts into positive thoughts, it may have glimpses of the Creator in His creation and may discover spiritual aspects in material events.

It may reject Satan's temptations, it may rise above the temptations of the self, it may distance itself from fruitless actions, it may make out its real well-wishers, it may accept advice, even if that be against its nature, it may develop anti-self thinking, and be able to set the goal of spirituality for itself, rising above material goals. One who thinks along these lines will become hereafter-oriented.

All these developments take place at the psychological level, being the result of deep thinking. One who cannot engage in deep thinking will never attain high levels of *tazkiyah*.

The process of *tazkiyah* can be initiated only in one who is capable of deep thought. *Tazkiyah*, in fact, is another name for psychological purification. First of all, *tazkiyah* is performed at the psychological level and only then is it possible for *tazkiyah* to be achieved at the level of the whole human existence.



The Importance of Positive Psychology

Four thousand years ago, Prophet Ibrahim settled his wife Hajar and his son Ismail in the desert of Arabia and returned to Syria. Later, when Ismail grew up he married a woman of the Jurhum tribe. After some time had elapsed, Ibrahim visited them and found only Ismail's wife at home. The woman complained of living in very difficult conditions. Ibrahim asked her to deliver the following message to Ismail, "Replace your doorway."

Ismail later divorced his wife and married another woman. After some time, Prophet Ibrahim came back to meet his family. Ismail was away and his new wife, rather than have any complaints or grudges was thankful for everything. On hearing this, Prophet Ibrahim said to her, "When Ismail comes home convey my message to him, 'Retain your doorway.'" (Sahih al-Bukhari)

Prophet Ibrahim had settled his family in the desert, so that in this natural environment a new generation would arise which would take up the mission of monotheism and spread it throughout the world. This incident concerning Prophet Ibrahim shows that the individuals required for this great task must above all have the quality of possessing a positive psychology, and have no propensity to complain. This shows what is of the utmost importance in the process of *tazkiyah*: that man cease to complain and give utterance to grievances and that he become a positive thinker in the full sense, in spite of having every cause for complaint. Negative thinking is a killer of *tazkiyah*, whereas positive thinking is the most essential condition for *tazkiyah*. A person who indulges in negative thinking becomes subject to Satan. On the contrary,

a person who engages in positive thinking lives in the companionship of the angels, and it is a fact that *tazkiyah* cannot be attained without the help of the angels.

Introspection — The Basis of *Tazkiyah*

There is a saying of Umar Faruq, “Introspect yourself before you are subjected to introspection.” Introspection is the basis of *tazkiyah*. It does not come about through a training camp. No formal course can serve this purpose, nor will any repetition of certain words be of any help. The only way to *tazkiyah* is through introspection, that is, self-appraisal, or reforming oneself, and by giving deep thought to how *tazkiyah* is to be attained.

Man is the only creature who has the capacity for conceptual thought. Indeed, man is defined as an animal capable of conceptual thought. You can shape wood, and you can mould iron, but man himself is not so malleable. Man is his own engineer or maker. If man is unwilling to submit to the influence of others, there is no one who can shape his personality. This is why introspection plays a role in man’s personality development, or his *tazkiyah*.

The role of a teacher is solely to provide a strong incentive for engaging in *tazkiyah*. He should develop the thinking in man that, if he does not engage in self-purification and reform himself, he will be forever ruined; he has to undertake *tazkiyah* himself and whatever he has to do should be done today without waiting for tomorrow.

Man tends to find justification for all of his faults; he always finds some words to prove that he is in the right.

It is necessary for one who wants to purify himself to root out this mentality once and for all. But this can be done only by the individual concerned, and not by anyone else.

How to Engage in Introspection

The real source of self-purification is introspection, that is, thinking about oneself, analyzing one's words and deeds, or in other words, becoming one's own judge, by thinking against oneself and assessing oneself objectively. And no *tazkiyah* is possible without such introspection.

The most powerful feeling in man is that of egoism. This feeling is so intense that every person lives with the notion that he is all in all. This is a form of self-glorification. This kind of attitude should be anathema to seekers of *tazkiyah*. What man should do is develop in himself anti-self thinking, so that he may stand up to criticism. This feeling was so intense in Umar ibn al-Khattab that he said, 'May God bless the man who sends me the gift of my shortcomings.'

This introspective mentality is born out of a discovery—that of one's own helplessness. The seeker of *tazkiyah* must discover the reality that his sense of 'I' exists only at the level of his own senses, or feelings. It doesn't exist in reality; he has no power over anything outside of his own feelings. He exercises no power in the matters of his life and death, the life support system, the divine court, etc. When man discovers his total powerlessness, the feeling of helplessness is necessarily born within him. It is this feeling of helplessness which compels man to engage in introspection and it is in this discovery that the real secret of *tazkiyah* lies.

Seeing a Test Paper in Advance

A true seeker of *tazkiyah* often finds clear guidance in the form of dreams. Through dreams he learns how to advance along his path, stage by stage. In this way, the seeker is able to make his choices with conviction as if blessed with special divine succour. It may be likened to a student having access to a test paper in advance. A seeker of *tazkiyah* is repeatedly faced with all kinds of questions. Suppose he has to take one of two options. If he prays to God on such occasions, it is quite possible that God may accept his prayer and guide him – through a dream – which may lead him from doubts and hesitation to conviction.

Such kinds of dreams are undoubtedly one of God's great blessings. But if someone does not accept guidance, even after having the dream, then his case may be likened to a student who failed in his exams even after having advance knowledge of his test paper.

Tazkiyah is 50% concerned with the seeker and 50% with God. The seeker of *tazkiyah* ought constantly to pray to God. This prayer will become a means to associating him with God. He should perform *istikhara* (two-rakat prayers) before going to bed, asking God to give him guidance through a dream. *Istikhara* is as if seeking God's counsel in his affairs. And one who does so consistently never goes astray. If God shows him a dream to solve his problem, then he should regard this as God having given him a preview of his paper. Indeed he has no other choice. One who is offered guidance by God to this extent, but who even then fails to accept His guidance would be committing an unpardonable crime. God will not accept any excuse from such a person and he will be deprived forever from establishing any contact with God.

Tazkiyah and Renunciation of the World

In later times one group adopted the path of renunciation of the world in order to attain *tazkiyah*. But disenchantment with the world is required in the psychological sense rather than in the practical sense. The concept of the renunciation of the world is a product of non-*dawah* (missionary) thinking. The world is inhabited by human beings, as such, renouncing the world is akin to renouncing people. A *da'i* cannot afford to abandon people on any pretext. Others may see people from other angles, but a *da'i* looks at man as a potential *madu*. In the eyes of a *da'i*, every man is a *madu*, be he rich or poor, a commoner or a VIP, ruler or ruled. Even if he is a rival or a tyrant, in the eyes of the *da'i*, he is a human being. And a *da'i*'s first desire is to convey the truth to him.

A *da'i* cannot afford to say that if someone enters from one gate, he will go out from another gate. He will instead say that the coming person (visitor) is a *madu* for him and, as such, he will meet him and convey the message of truth to him with wisdom.

Renouncing the world is, in fact, renouncing the *madu*. Renouncing the world is, in effect, to go away from those to whom the *da'i* would normally want to convey the divine truth. A businessman can walk away from everything but he cannot walk away from his customers. In a similar way, a *da'i* can tolerate everything but he cannot tolerate going to a secluded place where there are no *madus*. When he remains among the *madus*, he may be beset by certain problems, but he overlooks them because he cannot afford to break off his relations with them. Along with *tazkiyah*, *dawah* is an equally

important goal for the believer. And if a believer is sincere it is not possible for him either to give up his efforts to attain *tazkiyah* or to give up his *dawah* activities.



Tazkiyah — An Act of Preparation

In the present material world, everyone is in need of some employment. Everyone wants a good job. That is why everyone prepares himself professionally to meet the demands of the job market. One who fails to do so will be a failure all his life.

The same is true of the world Hereafter. But its exigencies are of a much more pressing nature. The world Hereafter is a world of divine activity of a very high order. In the Hereafter only that person will succeed who readies himself spiritually in this present world with the thought of the Hereafter in his mind. One who fails to prepare oneself appropriately in this world will be a failure in the Hereafter.

All this relates to competence. One type of competence works in this world, while another type of competence will avail in the Hereafter. In this world, a source other than God may work but, in the Hereafter, monotheism alone will be of any avail. In this world making one's own self one's sole concern is advantageous but, in the Hereafter, it is making God one's sole concern which will be of benefit. In this world, looking at things from the material angle is profitable but, in the Hereafter, only looking at things from the spiritual angle will be of any use. Materialism (interest-based thinking) benefits one in this world but, in the next world, only a man of principle will succeed. In this world dishonesty apparently works, whereas in that other world it is only honesty which will work. In this world, giving importance to immediate interests works but, in the next world, it is only giving importance to other-worldly interests which will be of any avail.

Tazkiyah means preparing oneself with regard to the

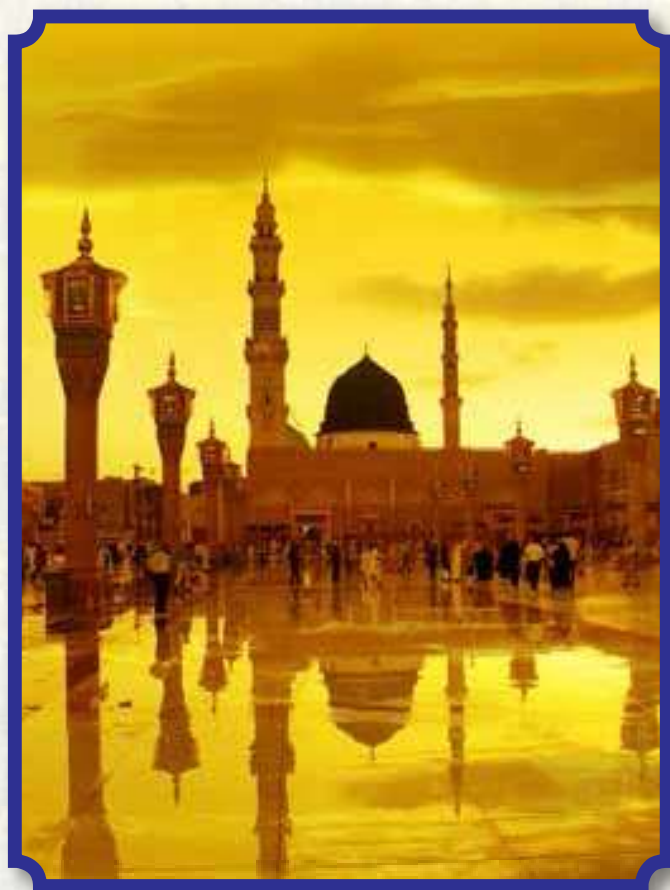
Hereafter, that is, developing in oneself those qualities which will benefit one in the Hereafter. The way of *tazkiyah* is to activate one's thinking. One way to do this is to identify such incidents in your life when you were going to be plunged into some great trouble but you were saved by the special succour of God. Such tragic incidents take place in the lives of all, but are subsequently forgotten.

It is a must for the seeker of *tazkiyah* to recall such incidents repeatedly in order to refresh his mind of how, when he had reached the very brink of destruction, he was saved by the special intervention of God. He should keep remembering every graphic detail of these incidents and beseech God thus: "O God, You have repeatedly saved me from the horrible consequences of my actions in the life of this world. In the same way, save me from the horrible punishment of hell in the hereafter."

Another approach to this matter is to remember your shortcomings, your mistakes and awaken in yourself a feeling of repentance. If you feel that in any matter you were 99% right and you were wrong by only 1%, then on such occasions, you should forget the 99% and exaggerate the 1% to the point where you begin to feel that you were 100% wrong. This will awaken the feeling of repentance in you. You will shudder in the fear of God and will turn to Him in prayer and seek His forgiveness.

There is nothing mysterious about *tazkiyah*. It is a known process, that is, thinking repeatedly about all aspects of self-purification. *Tazkiyah* is always the result of an intellectual awakening, rather than the result of some mysterious miracle. The more one thinks about this matter, the more one will be able to attain a state of self-purification. *Tazkiyah* is a conscious process

in the full sense. And hoping to achieve it without undergoing this conscious process is just wishful thinking. It will never become a reality.



Tazkiyah — A Means of Reaching God

Man is the creation and God is his Creator. As such, it is human nature that he should come close to God to the ultimate extent. But various things, such as pride, negative thinking, etc., separate man from God. *Tazkiyah* aims at thoroughly purifying man of such negative feelings. The moment one detaches oneself from things other than God, one instantly feels that one has come as close to one's Creator as it is humanly possible to come. One begins to experience the presence of God all around one.

The level of nearness to God depends on the level of personal realization of God. For instance, everyone is in need of innumerable things to survive in this world. But no human being is the creator of all these things. Someone else has bestowed them upon mankind, and God is undoubtedly that Bestower. God, the Supreme Being, is the only Giver. It is undoubtedly due to God's unilateral blessings that man can exist in this world. If—even for a moment—this chain of blessings were broken, man would no longer be able to sustain himself.

When an individual discovers God as His Benefactor, then quite naturally a fountain of love for God wells up in his soul. Then he becomes the embodiment of the reality described thus in the Quran: "Those who believe love God most." (2:165). The Quran enjoins self-prostration as being necessary for nearness to the Creator: "Prostrate yourself and come closer to God." (96:19)

What is this self-prostration? It is, in fact, the obeisance made by one who is filled with the love and fear of God: with these intense feelings, he falls prostrate before his Lord—this kind of prostration is as if a divine ascent (*mi'raj*) for the believer.

The Purpose of *Tazkiyah*

Chapter 39 of the Quran describes the people of Paradise thus: “Those who fear their Lord will be led in groups towards Paradise. When they reach it, its gate will be opened, and its keepers will say to them, ‘Peace be upon you. You have done well, enter Paradise and dwell in it forever,’ and they will say, ‘Praise be to God who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us the inheritors of this land, letting us settle in the Garden wherever we want.’ How excellent is the reward of those who labour! You shall see the angels circling about the throne, glorifying their Lord with praise. And judgement will have been passed in justice on all and it will be said, ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe!’” (39:73-75)

The invocation, ‘Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe’ is a part of the first chapter in relation to this present world, while in this Chapter 39, these words relate to the world of the Hereafter. This shows that what is truly desired of man is that he should lead a life of remembrance and glorification of God. What is desirable in this world is equally desirable in the next world. The actual aim of *tazkiyah* is to bring into existence such purified souls as may glorify God and become a part of the life Hereafter.

One task assigned to man in this present world was to bring civilization into existence – a task performed by man on a very large scale. This journey of civilization began from the Stone Age and was taken to the heights of the electronic age. It gained enormous momentum with discovery of the laws of nature. But what, in effect, happened was that a right was mixed with a wrong. After overcoming the forces of nature, man became insolent and established a despotic system; he encouraged anarchy in the name of freedom; he promoted nudity or semi-nudity in the name of fashion, and so on. That is why on the Day of Judgement God

will select righteous people who will be given the opportunity to establish a divine civilization. This is the reality which finds expression in this verse of the Quran: “My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.” (21:105)

It is a fact that human life is a journey of realization, which extends from this world to the Hereafter. In this world, the journey of realization takes place on a very limited scale. On the contrary, in the Hereafter the journey of realization will know no limits. However, this journey may be successfully undertaken only by one who has proved to be a deserving candidate by having purified his soul. The Quran tells us that God’s words are so innumerable that even if the seven seas were doubled and all these seas were turned into ink and all the trees of the world were turned into pens, even then the ink would not suffice to write down all of God’s words. The Quran expresses it thus: “If all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas added to it, the words of God would not be exhausted.” (31:27)

This is not simply a statement but a command by God Almighty to be followed by believers. This means that believers ought to discover the words of God and thus continue discovering God’s wonders and increasing their realization of His power. The first verse of the Quran, “Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe,” is the beginning and not the end. This verse announces the beginning of the journey of realization in this world. At another place this verse appears with reference to the world hereafter: “It will be said, ‘Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe.’” (39:75)

This second verse tells us the ultimate stage of realization, which will continue for all eternity in the most favourable environment of the Hereafter.

In the first stage of realization the scientists of the 19th and

20th centuries have played a very great role in providing a scientific framework for the realization of God.

As we learn from the Quran, in the life hereafter, the believers will be supported by the angels in their journey of realization: “We are your companions in this life and in the Hereafter.” (41:31)



The Criterion of *Tazkiyah*

What is the criterion of *tazkiyah*? It is that one becomes so in tune with the Islamic way of thinking and the Islamic way of life that one feels that one is being guided by the voice of one's own nature. Without any hesitation one should be willing to accept this, even if it runs counter to one's cherished desires.

The real aim of *tazkiyah* is attachment to God. This is the whole truth. To put it another way, *tazkiyah* enables one to focus so totally on God that one become free of all other considerations, save devotion to God. *Tazkiyah* enables one to make God the centre of one's attention in the complete sense.

Making God one's sole concern is no simple matter. It is akin to bringing about a total revolution in man's psyche. One who experiences such a revolution takes God as the Giver in the full sense, and regards himself as the taker in the full sense. His thinking becomes God-oriented: his feelings are centred entirely on God. His words and deeds reflect the divine culture. Modesty grows within him, he becomes a man cut to size. His heart is full of well-wishing instead of hatred for others. Instead of becoming haughty and insolent, he becomes modest.

His attitude to others is submissive rather than insolent. In all matters, he owns up to his own mistakes rather than blame others. He begins to prefer remaining silent rather than be talkative. Instead of occupying the front seat, he prefers to take the back seat.

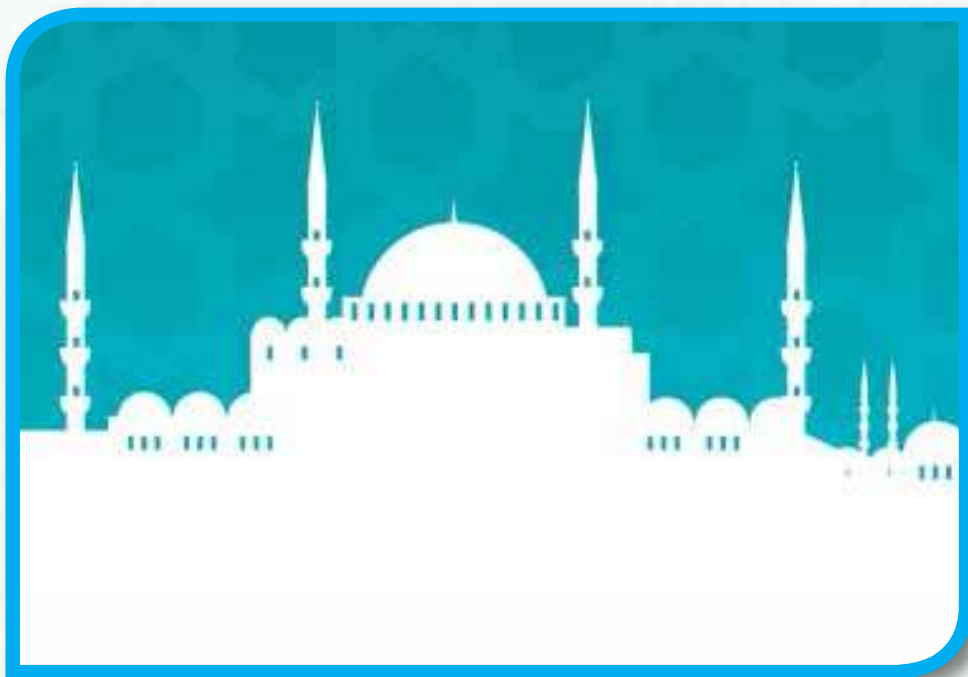
Before uttering a single word, he gives thought to whether his words in the presence of God will be accepted or rejected. In private, he is as cautious as he is in public.

Tazkiyah and Remembrance of Death

For the process of *tazkiyah* to go forward, the remembrance of death acts as a very powerful spur.

The remembrance of death produces a sense of urgency in man. Death reminds him of the fact that he cannot afford to procrastinate in his striving towards *tazkiyah*, a task which has to be undertaken today itself, for nobody knows for certain whether tomorrow will be the day of death or of life.

The concept of death reminds man of the moment when he will die, and that afterwards he will face a very grave situation. This moment of death has been described thus in the Quran: "The Day when mankind will stand before the Lord of the Universe." (83:6). This will be the day when angels will take man before God. God, who knows everything, both open and hidden, will take him to account for all his words and deeds on earth. According to one



tradition, man will on that day stand before God and his feet will not move until he has answered all the questions God will ask him.

Remembering death means remembering the most delicate moment of man's life. He must keep thinking about the time – which is certainly going to come – when his eternal future will be decided.

Such thinking must certainly produce an upheaval. It is a fact that one who thinks about death in this manner will be extremely concerned about *tazkiyah*. He will try to the ultimate extent to attain *tazkiyah* from every aspect before death overtakes him, for then he will have reached a point where there is no time left for reform.



Tazkiyah

Purification of the Soul

Tazkiyah literally means purification. In the extended sense it means growth. In this respect, *tazkiyah* means intellectual development. The mind is not something stagnant, it is ever-growing, like a tree. It is this process which is called “adding faith to their faith” (48:4) in the Quran. Adding faith to faith means development in consciousness, which is another name for intellectual development. The real faith is one which does not stagnate, but grows continuously in its conviction about God.

How does *tazkiyah* or intellectual development take place? The path to this is contemplation. Contemplation is in itself a continuous process – contemplating the Quran and Hadith, the life of the Prophet, the lives of the Companions, the various human disciplines, the universe, the earth and the heavens. There is also the kind of contemplation which takes place during serious discussions. In this process of contemplation, new ideas emerge, deeper meanings come to light, new aspects hitherto unexplored of different events and realities are discovered, and every experience will bring him closer to God.

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